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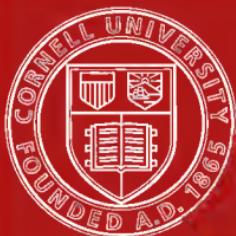
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The return to mutton.



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THE RETURN TO MUTTON

By

JAMES N. ROSENBERG



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MITCHELL KENNERLEY**

ACT I

THE RETURN TO MUTTON

ACT I

SCENE:— *A living room. It is a wet November evening. John and Jane have just finished dinner. This is the room which they have inhabited for the eight years of their married life. It is a place which has grown with them. It was not arranged at one fell swoop. It is no choice product of the skilled decorator's hand, — a bandy-legged Chippendale turns shudderingly from its neighbor, a jovial, fat and plebeian mission chair. And yet, the room, over-crowded with an ill-assorted medley of trash, has associations and atmosphere. It has been acquainted with passion, ecstasy, anguish; and thence those discordant descending scales, — annoyance, irritation, contempt. Now, alas, it has settled down. One fears it is not a stranger to that bitterest of tragedies,— boredom.*

The pictures are a large photogravure of Corot's "Ville D'Avray" a Childe Hassam, a colored print of Rossetti's "Lillith," a mezzotint of Lord Mansfield, and, — almost dominating the room,— a very large post-impressionist canvas,— a brilliant piece of color.

As for the arrangement of the room, there is a door at the back, standing open. Beyond, one sees a corridor and stairway. At the right is a fireplace. A fire is burning, but listlessly. Between the fireplace and the door at the back is a window looking out upon the street. The shade is part way up. One gets a glimpse

of wet pavements outdoors. In front of the fireplace is a large, well-worn couch. Back of the couch is a table strewn with novels, magazines and newspapers. There are bookcases against the walls in which stand a miscellany of books, including a fair-sized library of law books. There is a door to the left.

John sits on a foot-stool before the fire. He is a smallish man in the middle thirties. He is rather bald; he wears horn-rimmed spectacles which give him an owlish look. His face is cheerful, agreeable, somewhat whimsical. He looks tired, and he is tired. He has been presiding in court all day, conducting the trial of a difficult case. He wears an old smoking jacket, gay in pattern,—a Joseph's coat of many colors,—soiled, worn and extraordinarily unbecoming. Old flowered carpet slippers stand on the hearth. John is contentedly toasting his feet. He smokes an old pipe. He is digesting his dinner. Perhaps he is planning tomorrow's judicial duties. Perhaps he is reflecting on other matters, but only sketchily, for his feet appear to engross most of his attention.

Jane sits at the other side of the room at a desk, her back to John, her profile to the audience. She is charmingly gowned in a last year's evening gown (which is still good enough for evenings at home). She is examining photographs, letters, papers of various sorts, tearing them into small bits, and throwing them into a waste basket.

They seem unconscious of each other's presence. Thus almost every night for eight years he has silently smoked his after dinner pipe. But let it not be supposed that they are really unconscious of each other. As for John, he not only knows she is there and knows

what she is doing, but sees into the depths of her mind. Still, he does not talk. Silence like this,— a wholly normal relationship between a man and his wife,— is to her, as to so many women, an incomprehensible language. Once or twice he steals a look at her. All this dumb show occupies enough minutes to indicate that the curtain has not risen on the beginning of their lives. The current has been flowing for a good many years and it is sluggish. Once or twice she, too, steals a glance at him, but their eyes do not meet. By degrees it appears that perhaps the fire smouldering on the hearth is not the only flame in the room. And now John's absorption in his feet increases. He takes off his socks. Skilfully, as if of long practice, he erects a pyramid of tongs, poker and shovel; he hangs his socks upon the apex. Bang. The pyramid collapses with a crash.

JANE (*startled from her absorption*)

John!

JOHN (*without looking at her*)

Hullo!

JANE

What was that?

JOHN (*beginning to rebuild the pyramid*)

Socks.

JANE

Fascinating subject.

JOHN

You asked a question; I answered. Drying socks is a tiresome business, but it's a perfectly moral occupation.

JANE

But aren't tiresome things wicked?

JOHN

Idols have feet; ergo, socks; feet of clay; clay is moist; (*all this time his back is turned to her; he is examining the socks*) ergo, damp socks. Ha! (*He lifts one sock into the air*) Dry as a bone. (*He finds a hole in the sock; puts his finger through it*) Ha! Ha! behold!

JANE

You didn't answer what I was saying at dinner.

JOHN

Twice one are two,— never one; we think so for a little while; but we find out.

JANE

So you won't try to —

JOHN

Soar like the lark? I'm glad to creep; man is a mole. (*He puts on his dry sock*)

JANE

And the things I care for —?

JOHN

Yesterday's or tomorrow's? Freud, Nietzsche; eugenics; suffrage; prostitution; Strindberg; sanitation; Dalcroze; vers libre; amour libre; the new theatre; the old Nick; vegetarianism; Christian Science; post-impressions (*he bows to the picture on the wall*) How dull they make my law suits. (*He rises and hops toward her on his stockinged foot and speaks whimsically*) Life's greatest litigation; romance against roast-beef; souls against socks; mystery against mutton. How I could try that case for the plaintiff. "Gather ye rosebuds while ye may." Three Herrick four fifty-six. And Shelley in his learned commentary declares, second edition,

page ten, "I arise from dreams of thee, and a spirit in my feet." (*He wiggles his bare toes*) Youth, the plaintiff, radiant, dazzling, palpitating! I used to palpitate.

JANE

Did you ever?

JOHN

One forgets. And the defendant —

JANE

Shall I describe him?

JOHN

How well I fill the part! Useful but uninspiring, dependable but dyspeptic, prosperous but prosaic. It's the tragedy of life. The defendant always wins.

JANE

Always?

JOHN

There is no exception. The rosebud fades; the caterpillar breakfasts on the petals. The end is always the same. The bad prevails.

JANE

Badness?

JOHN

Stupidity, age, ugliness, baldness, a paunch, rheumatism, boredom; — all the bad things. Only the young die good. (*He sniffs*) My sock! It's burning. (*He hops rapidly to the fire to rescue it, but in doing so stubs his toe*) Ouch! (*And sitting cross-legged on the floor he stops to nurse it*) My toe; I believe I broke it.

JANE (*without offering to rise*)

Phew, what a smell! (*He rescues the sock*)

JOHN (*reproachfully*)

The burning brand! And where were you while I lay wounded?

JANE (*calmly*)

You'll get over it. You get over everything.

JOHN (*philosophically — meantime putting on his socks and slippers*) One bows to life's decrees.

JANE

And that's your only answer to all I said?

JOHN

It's not my answer.

JANE

Whose then?

JOHN

Life's.

JANE

I won't accept it.

JOHN

Boiled mutton, Jane. Suppose you'd eaten nothing else for eight years. (*He calculates rapidly on his fingers*) Good God! Ten thousand meals. Behold! (*He goes toward her, the slippers flopping with each step*) The boiled mutton. (*He bows, indicating himself*) One learns the other's tricks — the whole bagful; the parlor tricks, the dining room tricks —

JANE

Company tricks, Judge tricks, even the bed room —

JOHN (*raising his hand deprecatingly*)

Ssh! Jane. . . . In fifteen minutes I'm due at the asylum meeting. What a bully little talk we've had. But if I run on like this, I'll miss my forty winks, and I've been holding court all day. (*He goes to the couch, lies down, pulls a cover over himself, adjusts*

the pillows and settles down with a sigh of vast contentment)

JANE

As for me, I refuse to be mutton.

JOHN

If only one could. Still, what delicious mutton you are,—done to a turn; crisp, wonderfully seasoned, so many adorable little capers, and so attractively served up. Anyone else would swear you are spring lamb.

JANE

But mutton for you.

JOHN

That's the devil of it. One little kiss? (*She does not move . . . resignedly*) Very well. . . . It's all the same.

JANE

I'm afraid so.

JOHN (*lifting himself on his elbows and exclaiming as if it were the supreme thing in life*) By Jove! What do you think? The new pills. Work like a charm! Fried onions for lunch. Fit as a fiddle.

JANE

How I envy you.

JOHN

Envy me?

JANE

You, at least, have a real interest in life.

JOHN

When all else fails, there is always the stomach. Wake me. Just ten minutes. (*He lies down again. Instantly almost, it appears, he falls asleep. He breathes deeply and snores with loud and peaceful*

regularity. The telephone rings. She takes up the receiver)

JANE (*at the telephone*)

Hello. You? (*A long pause*) . . . Almost? . . . I—I think so. Not this evening. . . . No—tomorrow. . . . Oh, I suppose I can't slam the door in your face.

[*Presently John awakes.*

JOHN (*sleepily and with a mighty yawn*)

Didn't I hear the 'phone?

JANE

Augustin.

JOHN

Coming over?

JANE

Yes.

JOHN

Good! . . . Dear little Augustin. (*A deep bow to the post-impressionist picture*)

JANE

Yet you used to like him.

JOHN

Doesn't wear — Mush — Mush.

JANE

The critics?

JOHN

I'm saying nothing against the picture, my dear. It's the man I'm talking about. Come up while I dress? (*He pauses for a reply, but she does not answer. He goes out left, leaving the smoking jacket and slippers on the couch. Jane stands before the fire reflecting; she sighs; then, with the habit of her sex at such moments, re-arranges her hair a little,*

puts out some of the lights, and lays a fresh log on the fire. John returns, carrying his other clothes) Thought I'd dress in here. Haven't quite finished our bully little talk. (*He throws his clothes on a chair behind the library table. He begins to dress; during his next speech he is dressing himself; a good deal of the time he is hidden behind the table*) It's no go, Jane. . . . I'm just a good old beast in harness. . . . Can't fly. . . . There goes a shoe lace. . . . I've tried. . . . You may not think so. . . I have, just the same. . . . No one in the world like you. . . . Too bad you're so fond of the upper air. (*His dressing proceeds; he has changed his trousers and puts on a fresh collar and a black tie*) Did you get my check? Added an extra hundred; gaso-lene's so high. (*He takes papers and bills from the discarded trousers pockets*) Gracious, Jennie. Nearly forgot. (*He offers her an envelope*) Guess.

JANE

You know I hate guessing.

JOHN (*impressively*)

It's something I got at Cobb's. (*But Jane is unrelenting*) You won't guess? Perhaps you'll look at it. It's the two cent Hawaiian Missionary.

JANE (*breathless — the words slipping out before she knows it*) The two!

JOHN

Look and see. (*He takes the stamp from the envelope, picks up a magnifying glass from the table and brings them both to her*)

JANE (*as if to humor him, but really dying to see it*) I suppose you won't be satisfied till I look at it (*and*

she eagerly examines it through the magnifying glass, turning it over and over)

JOHN (*proudly*)

Beauty, isn't it?

JANE

But what a dreadful extravagance.

JOHN

Don't forget how that set's advancing. It's a first-class investment.

JANE

And so, of course, it was really an economy to buy it.

JOHN

Well, wasn't it? Besides, it's your set.

JANE

What's that got to do with it?

JOHN

Well, you see, if we ever should fall out, you know (*she steals a quick look at him*) — Oh, well, that little set might come in handy for you. (*He meets her eyes and changes the subject instantly*) And now for the deaf, the dumb and the blind. (*And with a final lurch here and a jerk there, he has settled himself into his clothes*)

[*Jane has the stamp in the palm of her hand; she speaks as if to it, with quiet irony.*

JANE

The deaf, the dumb and the blind.

[*John has gathered his discarded clothes and reached the door; he turns suddenly.*

JOHN

I, their guardian; I, blind as a bat, deaf as a door-knob, dumb as a dish-cloth. Yet, there are moments when the veil seems lifted.

JANE

Are there?

JOHN

Shall I prove it to you?

JANE

Do.

JOHN

Will telling you what Master Augustin and you are debating prove it? (*He has struck home. Her hands drop to her sides; the stamp flutters to the floor. Having delivered this proof that he is not, perhaps, so blind, after all, he looks fixedly into her eyes for an instant*) You dropped the missionary. (*He quietly picks up the stamp, lays it on the table and goes to the door left*) I'll be back in a minute. (*Jane, silent, stares after him. In a moment he returns with hat, overcoat, rubbers and umbrella. Jane still stands where he left her*)

Rather decent of me to get out, so you might arrange your thoughts? Sometimes even a wife must be ready. And a husband must always be prepared.

JANE

For how long have you had them ready, your clever little phrases?

JOHN

For months. (*He puts on his rubbers*)

JANE

Still, you must be quite upset. Those are your old rubbers.

JOHN

So they are . . . that's dreadful.

JANE

And you've let it go right on?

JOHN

It's like typhoid. The doctor does little with these fevers.

JANE

Are there no medicines for them?

JOHN

None that amount to anything.

JANE

Poor, helplessly clever John. You aren't able to comprehend that some collector might think me an even rarer specimen than this. (*Pointing to the stamp*) Otherwise you'd have reached out a hand for me. Unless you don't care.

JOHN

Don't talk nonsense. (*Tenderly*) Is there another woman in all the world who would have known that British Guinea was a counterfeit?

JANE

Then why haven't you reached out a hand?

JOHN (*indignantly*)

Haven't I?

JANE

I've not observed it.

JOHN

Haven't I thrown you and Gussie together on every possible occasion? (*Jane bursts out laughing*) Go on, laugh. Don't you see it's the case of the mutton?

JANE

Wonderful John. Now I see. What a schemer you are.

JOHN (*benignly, not doubting that his scheming has been a complete success*) For a change anyone

might enjoy a taste of mush. Mush, I say. But for a steady diet there is nothing like mutton. So I reasoned, if I fed you up on mush, you'd get sick of mush. Mush; it turns the stomach.

JANE

Are you sure it does?

JOHN (*patting her benevolently on the head*)

Why, of course, my adorable child.

JANE

How can you explain, then, why it is, that the more I get of mush, the more I want of it? Jack, Jack, if only you'd kept some of it in your make-up.

JOHN (*soothingly*)

We are as we are.

JANE

Heavens! And now you're going to say "To thine own self be true."

JOHN

Well?

JANE

Well? And what of the woman? And which one of your several selves? The one that once published a sonnet sequence?

JOHN (*with a wry face*)

Dead and gone — and thank God.

JANE (*quoting*)

"Dawn's bloom across the night, O sacred flame,
Love, inextinguishably bright, you came."

JOHN (*anguished*)

Stop. I implore you.

JANE

That little book; it was the first present you gave

me. And you killed the man who wrote it — and buried him deep in the ground.

JOHN (*very much upset*)

Then don't dig up the remains.

JANE

And what has that self of yours done to this self of mine? What have you known of my growing pains? You've clothed me, fed me, housed me. You've had no mistresses. I wish you had.

JOHN (*aghast*)

What?

JANE

You might have really cared for lamb once in a while. But the judge has murdered the man. And it was the man I married. So you needn't have been so considerate. You needn't have given me time to get ready. I am ready.

JOHN (*composedly*)

You can't frighten me. He's far too much of an ass. And now, really, I must run along.

JANE

Bottom made Titania happy. (*The bell rings; there is a pause*) "To thine own —"

JOHN

It's the very corner-stone.

JANE

I suppose I'm entitled to my little corner-stone?

JOHN

Absolutely.

JANE

I intend to have it.

JOHN (*at the door-way, just leaving, but politely inter-*

ested) Good! And just how do you intend to carry out this admirable theory?

JANE

Haven't I made that clear?

JOHN (*unruffled*)

Scarcely.

JANE (*very quietly*)

I propose to carry it out by going away with Augustin.

JOHN (*amused at the idea*)

It's always an interesting theory — though, of course, not novel.

JANE

And you're sure it's only a theory?

JOHN (*his hand on the door-knob*)

How can it possibly be anything else? My regards to Augustin.

JANE (*confronting him and looking him squarely in the eyes*) It's unthinkable folly, isn't it?

JOHN (*stroking her cheek*)

And we have sense, we have.

JANE

Have we?

JOHN

Haven't we?

JANE (*quietly removing his hand*)

I'm afraid not. It's going to happen.

[*There is a long, silent moment. John peers into her face; slowly his complacent look changes to one of doubt. They are standing near the hearth. Steps are heard on the stair-case. Jane crosses the room to the head of the stairs. John remains half-hidden at the fireplace. And now Augustin enters.*

He is dripping wet. His soft, broad-brimmed hat drops puddles, his shoes are soaking. Augustin is a tall and slender youth, aged about seven and twenty; his face is wan; there are shadows under his eyes; his hair is curly and needs the barber's shears; his attire is intended to be consciously unusual, but he has achieved little more than the low collar, the flowing Windsor tie, the baggy paint-soiled trousers of the young artist. In Bohemia he is the ne plus ultra of convention. On the stage — and he is an inveterate theatre-goer — he would be a perfect type. Yet, taken altogether, if Augustin is mush, there is, it cannot be gainsaid, something about him that makes mush not altogether unpalatable for one weary of mutton. At the door-way, he pauses, a poseur, perhaps, — does not adolescence always strike attitudes? — but a poetic and alluring figure of youth just the same, casts his wet hat with a sweeping gesture from him to fall where it may, passes his hand over his wet brow, brushes a few stray dripping strands from his eyes, and, not seeing John, stretches his arms out and clasps Jane's two hands, bends over her and covers her arms with kisses.

AUGUSTIN

Rose of the world! (John, awake at last to the reality of the impossible thing, has seized the poker, and moves grimly toward them. Augustin turns to John, For a moment he is startled; but he collects himself instantly and from his greater height frowns down on John, as upon an intruder. But John is not impressed. John advances grimly, clenching the poker)

JOHN

Once in a while a rat gets into my house. This

poker has finished more than one bit of vermin. (*He raises the weapon. It is a formidable one and John means business. But Augustin, arms majestically folded, stands unflinching. Jane, knowing John, looks on unmoved, the ghost of a smile on her lips*)

AUGUSTIN

Go on. Go on. Why pause, in this, life's crucial moment? Smite if you dare. Kill, if you can. Will it bring back what you have lost?

[*John stares menacingly into Augustin's face. A curious thing happens. The poker develops a will of its own. It declines to descend. Why will not this fellow fight? or at least run away? The poker's a dangerous weapon. One might hit too hard. A cracked skull? An indictment? The judicial habits of a decade stay his arm. It relaxes; gradually he lowers the poker. He drops it. It clatters upon the floor.*

JOHN

I'm afraid he's right, Jane. I may as well go to my meeting.

JANE

By no means, John. We've started. But we have not finished.

JOHN

My dear child, it's mutton or mush. There's nothing left but for the jury to retire. I shall return in an hour to take the verdict.

JANE

But, if I have some things to say to you?

JOHN (*resignedly*)

Very well. Come, Gussie, we'll talk the thing to tatters. Let's sit down and be uncomfortable. Have

a cigar? (*He lights one himself*) The dear old triangle, sometimes obtuse, often acute, but never right. (*He drops into the arm chair near the fire*) But look at Gussie. The poor thing's soaking. First we must take care of him. A hot toddy, Gussie?

JANE

Poor boy, you *are* wet.

[*Augustin knows very well he is wet. He would like nothing better than a hot toddy. But to Augustin this dripping entrance was irresistible.*

AUGUSTIN (*spurning the suggestion of hot toddy and addressing Jane*) Rose of the world, I came to you, my heart was singing, my eyes were with the stars. Was it raining?

JOHN

Was it raining? Rose of the world, he is superb.

JANE (*from the hearth*)

Come here, please, Augustin.

AUGUSTIN (*obedient, though wondering what the devil she is up to*) Rose of the world.

JANE

Your coat, please. Why, it's drenched. (*And she makes him take it off*) Now, this, please. (*And she holds the smoking jacket outspread*)

JOHN

My smoking jacket?

JANE

Put it on. (*And she forces the arms of the mutely and vainly protesting Augustin into the ridiculous garment which is absurdly tight and short in the sleeves*)

JOHN

See here, Jane. Why don't we take off his shoes?

Gussie's feet are sopping. November weather; the grippe; regular epidemic.

JANE (*coolly*)

It's a splendid idea. Augustin, won't you please sit on the footstool? (*Gently but firmly she pushes Augustin to the footstool and sets to work to unlace his boots*)

AUGUSTIN

I beg you, dearest one —

JANE (*with a look at John*)

Love's service. Don't stop me, Augustin.

JOHN (*looking on*)

Charming, charming. But do we progress?

JANE (*having now unlaced the boots*)

Lift up your foot.

JOHN

Up, Gussie.

[*Augustin with a hopeless gesture lifts his foot. She pulls off a boot. It makes a wet scrunch as it comes off.*

AUGUSTIN (*involuntarily*)

O! O!

JOHN

His pet corn. Do be careful, Jane.

JANE

The other one, please. (*Off comes the other. She places his feet on the fender and puts the carpet slippers on them*) There.

JOHN

Ich dien. Love's service. Sacred ceremony.

AUGUSTIN (*picking up John's ridicule and, with a thrilling voice, transmuting it into a lyric*) Love's service. Rose of the world — (*he takes her hands*)

Dearest one. (*He presses them to his lips, sniffs involuntarily, and draws away*)

[*This is John's chance and he takes it.*

JOHN

Love's service. His boots, Jane. His head was in the stars. But where were Augustin's dear little feet? (*With which exceedingly vulgar remark John bursts into loud laughter. To complete the victory he laughs loudly and a little longer than is needful. To his surprise he finds that his laughter has rather a hollow sound. It dies away lamely*)

JANE (*looking at him pityingly*)

A few moments ago I asked you to stay, John. I told you we had only started. Now —

JOHN

But now I don't want to go.

JANE

You needn't. We're going. If you are sure, Augustin?

AUGUSTIN (*springing to his feet*)

You mean it?

JANE

If you want me.

AUGUSTIN

Need you ask?

JANE

One has to be awfully certain.

AUGUSTIN (*a little frightened at his daring and giving her a chance to back out*) He is a proud master of laws and men. I am an humble servant of art. I am poor — he is mighty. He is an emperor. I am a slave.

JOHN (*reassuringly*)

Don't be so scared, Gussie. She doesn't really mean it, you know.

AUGUSTIN (*stung by John's penetration and swept away for the moment by his real belief in his own passion*) But if utter devotion, if the adoration of the slave, if the desire of the moth for the star, the hunger of the bud for the glory of spring suffice to make you sure, come. (*And, as if it were a solemn rite, he clasps Jane to his breast, adoringly, protectingly, masterfully. It is more than John can stand*)

JOHN (*in a furious treble,— his voice, as it is apt to do in very tense moments, cracking*) Take your hands off my wife. Get out of my house.

AUGUSTIN (*rising splendidly to the occasion, Jane in his arms*) The Judge enjoins us. Do you think this your grimy court room? No, this is the wide field of life. The law? Man-made dogma; you who fatten on it, what do you know of God's decrees? Was she once yours? Did you minister to her dreams, feed her aspirations? Now she is mine, mine by the divine law which has made me hers.

[*John is heartily ashamed of his outburst, and now, dead in earnest, he makes his last stand.*

JOHN

And so, Jane, the argument of eight years is nothing?

JANE

I am not old enough to live in the past.

JOHN

Have we quarreled?

JANE

At first. It was then I was happy. We struck sparks.

JOHN

Aren't we good pals? Haven't we the same tastes?

JANE

We both drink orange juice at breakfast, I admit.

JOHN

Don't we loathe the same people? The Vanderbooks, the Griswolds? Hey, Jennie?

AUGUSTIN (*contemptuously*)

And you both enjoy the movies, I believe. What ties!

JOHN

Yes, Augustin. And so do we both like the windows wide open at night — no matter how freezing it is. Do you? And we love Beethoven, beefsteak and the Bab-Ballads, and abominate the opera and dote on our Sunday afternoon foursomes. Why, we even like your pictures, both of us. I'm sure you're with us there. And then there are the stamps. You're not throwing all that overboard, Jane?

JANE (*moved*)

They do count — those things. But, Jack, those are the trifles. Don't you see it's best for us both to say good-bye? Don't you see I'm no more to you than you to me? Don't you see that in all the big things, the real things, you have given me nothing but ashes when I begged, simply begged, for only a crust?

JOHN

But don't you see it's all these little things that make up that big thing called life? Sympathy, communion and all that? Don't you see that your

graceful little slippers won't fit him any better than they do me? It can't be done. Don't you see that?

AUGUSTIN

Thank God I'm blind.

JOHN

But you, Jane?

JANE (*doubtfully*)

Perhaps you're right. But if you are, I want to be blind for the rest of my life.

JOHN

But your eyes are open, old girl. You can't shut them; you can't.

AUGUSTIN (*bending over her head*)

If only I had more to offer you.

JOHN (*blithely — the victory in his grasp*)

One does wonder about the rent.

JANE (*landing upon terra firma with a terrific impact*)

The rent?

JOHN (*irrevocably in the mire*)

The landlord and the butcher. They always obtrude.

JANE

Now, I see. . . . You've made it all so clear.

AUGUSTIN

On the one hand (*with a sweep of his arm he takes in the room*) you have all this; on the other,— dear, dear heart,— you have only me.

JANE (*in a tone that leaves no doubt*)

I've made my choice.

JOHN (*knowing it's all over, but a game loser*)

It's all up with you, Gussie. You've won.

AUGUSTIN

Grow fat while we starve, and who shall be the richer?

JOHN (*sinking into a chair*)

That's the problem — and well put.

AUGUSTIN

We shall beg on street corners, and you may drop a penny in my hat.

JOHN

Or commit you for vagrancy.

AUGUSTIN (*brilliantly ironic*)

The victory is yours — your creed of life — But we are magnanimous. We do not grudge you it.

JANE (*bending over John's chair and kissing him lightly on the bald spot on the top of his head*) I've always been fond of you. (*She takes Augustin's arm and leads him to the door at the back. The slippers flop as he follows her. He casts a hopeless look at his coat and shoes. But he knows that they are lost forever*)

JOHN

Better take a rain-coat, Jane.

[*They have reached the stairway.*

Keep an eye open for that five cent Hawaiian. . . .

[*He rises and looks after them. Jane has already disappeared down the stairs. There remains to be seen of the pair only Augustin's head and back.*

Look here. My smoking jacket.

JANE (*hysterically*)

The smoking jacket. The carpet slippers. We'll take them for keepsakes. (*They go down the stairs.*

From below, unseen, Jane calls) Your pills, John.

Isn't it time for them? (*A door slams*)

JOHN (*going to the open door*)

Jane, Jane. (*But no answer comes*) Poor Jane. (*He looks down the stairs, then he goes to the window, raises the shade, opens the window; the rain beats in upon him*) She'll get drenched. (*He leans out, calling*) Hey, you two! (*Louder*) Jane! (*At the top of his voice*) Jane! Jane! Don't do this. Jane! Jane! (*He closes the window with a bang*) She's done it. Poor old girl. . . . What a pity. . . . It'll be lonely. Still life goes right on. What a bungler I've been. . . . Brace up. No impure passion of remorse. (*The clock strikes ten. He watches it, takes a little bottle from his waistcoat pocket, extracts two pills, makes a great business of swallowing them, takes a gulp of water from the glass on the table*) Bitter, bitter. (*He opens the window once more. The rain beats in upon him*)

ACT II

ACT II

SCENE: Ten months later. It is about four o'clock of a September afternoon. The domicile of Jane and Augustin. They occupy a chamber on the top story of a Venetian palace. It is a large, splendid and indescribably shabby room. But, magnificent as it was in the days of the Doges, the squalor to which it has fallen awakens a genuine feeling of pity.

The cracked walls are spotted with mould. Large areas of plaster have fallen away. The handsome pilasters at the doorways are irreparably damaged; the cornices are chipped; the paint has peeled. At the back of the room, extending nearly its entire width, are windows. The latticed blinds are down to keep out the sun's glare. The room has two entrances, one at the left, the other nearly opposite.

There is an easel in the middle of the room upon which stands a nearly finished canvas,—a life-size self-portrait of Augustin,—done chiefly in oranges and purples,—and really very well painted,—a dozen or so of paint rags lie on the floor near the easel. Paint brushes, tins of turpentine, palettes,—the tools of the trade,—are to be seen.

This room is their studio, bedroom, dining-room and kitchen, and contains their various impedimentia. At the left stands a pine table, upon which are an oil stove and tin plates; cheap knives and forks are upon the table. Beside the oil stove is a cupboard littered with

dishes, pots, pans, bottles, packages, oranges, a jar of pickles, etc,—a piece of faded brocade is tacked along the top of the cupboard, but is thrown aside. There is also a wash-stand,—a soiled roller-towel above.

Along the opposite wall are a double bed and chest of drawers, a pier-glass and a couch strewn with disordered coverlets; on the couch lies Augustin sprawling at full length and nursing a cold. Augustin wears a little Vandyke beard.

There are many hooks on the wall; and from these depend various articles of attire. In a dark corner one may, if observant, discern shoes, paint-rags, rolls of canvas. One must admit that the occupants of this room are not meticulous in the matter of housekeeping.

Presently someone fumbles at the door left. Augustin springs eagerly to his feet. Jane enters, leaving the door open. Seeing it is she, Augustin drops back to the couch, greatly disappointed.

AUGUSTIN

It's you.

JANE

Whom were you expecting?

AUGUSTIN

Witherspoon.

JANE

O!

[*Silence descends on them. A basket hangs on Jane's arm. This she carries to the table upon which she empties its contents,—potatoes, carrots, a loaf of bread, several little parcels. At the sight of food Augustin cheers up the least bit. He lifts himself for a moment on his elbows, glances at the potatoes*

and carrots, but almost at once drops back despondently. Jane puts on an apron,— it is rather soiled,— gets a pan and a knife; lifts the lid of a pot that is simmering on the stove, stirs the contents, tastes the concoction, shakes in a bit of salt, settles herself into a rocking chair and busies herself slicing and paring the potatoes. This job accomplished, she puts them and a dab of butter into the pan and sets it on the stove. She cuts a few thick slices of bread.

AUGUSTIN

Thinner slices, I implore you, rose of the world.

[Without answering, Jane looks at the pot once more. As she lifts the lid the steam arises from it. Augustin sniffs.

AUGUSTIN

O God! Cabbage again? (He lifts himself with a groan to a sitting posture)

JANE

Your cold must be a little better. The lumbago bad as ever?

[But Augustin only shakes his head in despair.

Cheer up. A cold and lumbago. Poor me, I haven't got anything at all.

AUGUSTIN

Mock. Mock.

JANE

A stiff back requires a stiff lip, Gussie. Never mind, it's darkest before the dawn.

AUGUSTIN

The dawn. It only shows our misery the clearer.

Why did I bring you down to this?

JANE

Am I complaining?

AUGUSTIN

My brave, brave girl. (*A fit of sneezing seizes him*)

JANE

I told you you ought to wear your muffler.
[*A baby's crying rends the air.*]

AUGUSTIN

It has been howling for hours.

JANE

But think of what we owe that child. For the few hours a day I take care of him see what Mrs. Vespuccio does for us.

AUGUSTIN

Does for us? Look at this place. Every chord in me revolts.

JANE

But, Gussie dear, one does have to keep going awfully hard after you. Just look at the paint rags.
(*She gathers them. They are silent again*)

AUGUSTIN

Have you found out how he discovered our whereabouts?

JANE (*shortly*)

It doesn't interest me.

AUGUSTIN

Patterson and Company will give us a thousand pounds for those stamps.

JANE (*turning to him with compressed lips*)

You wrote?

AUGUSTIN

Yes, I wrote. I wrote. I wrote. Was it a crime?

JANE

You know I won't sell them.

AUGUSTIN

You admit they are yours. He only sent you what belongs to you. Tardily enough, too.

JANE (*icily*)

We've been all over that.

AUGUSTIN

Do I want the money for myself? Do I? What sentiment for him makes you keep them, then? Answer me that.

JANE

Is that fair?

AUGUSTIN

When I think that nothing less than starvation faces you —

JANE

What? With all this cabbage?

AUGUSTIN

O God. Cabbage. I'm out of rose madder. Not another tube of vert emeraud. That ends the painting.

JANE (*a little impatiently*)

Art must starve, too, for a little while. (*Conciliatingly*) Never mind, Gussie, you've painted a lot. It won't hurt you to loaf.

AUGUSTIN

You're right. Who cares whether I paint or not?

JANE

That's silly. With your two canvases on the line!

AUGUSTIN

What does it amount to? Who looks at them? The artists — the real ones — they know. I'm no good, Jane. The pictures are fourth-rate. I am fourth-rate.

JANE

Third, anyway, Gussie. Come along now; show me what you've been doing. (*She takes a step towards the canvas*) Why, Gussie, you've not touched it. . . .

AUGUSTIN

It's not worth while.

JANE

And you put me out just so you might work alone. . . . Lazy boy . . . (*his remark about Witherspoon flashes back into her mind . . . reproachfully*) You sent me away because of Witherspoon. . . . That wasn't quite frank, was it? . . . (*Her voice grows a little sharp*) . . . Was it? . . . Was it?

AUGUSTIN

Yes, I was deceiving you. Yes, I was lying. Yes, I was trying to hide from you the fact that he will not come where his friend's wife is. Yes, I tried to spare you. He said something about buying a picture. (*Brokenly*) He never even came.

JANE (*remorsefully*)

Never mind. He'll be here tomorrow.

[*Augustin sinks into the couch in black despair. Jane resumes attention to the stove. And now a man's figure appears at the open doorway. A conspicuous object enough, resplendently clad in white flannels, a white cap perched jauntily on his head, a rose in his button-hole, he stands nevertheless unnoticed by Jane and Augustin. It is difficult to believe that this is John. For the man is lean, bronzed, fit and ten years younger than the John of ten months ago. But John has had a vaca-*

tion. He has climbed the Andes, bathed in the surf at Hawaii, played golf at Sandwich and Prestwick, flirted with the pretty Geisha girls, gazed at the Sphinx and crossed the Siberian steppes. With silent interest he surveys the scene, gaining some idea of where their dreams and aspirations have led them. Augustin lifts his head.

AUGUSTIN

Jane, the tobacco! You didn't forget?

JANE

Sorry. No more till we pay up.

AUGUSTIN

My God. No tobacco! . . . O, my God.

JOHN (*briskly*)

Have one of my cigars? (*John has exploded his bomb. The results are instant. Augustin, the lumbago forgotten, springs to his feet, staring at the apparition. Jane, less demonstrative, is, however, no less startled. She stands, spoon upraised, as if turned into a pillar*) May the Philistine enter the shrine of art, the temple of romance? . . . So, at last, my dear, dear friends, we meet again. And to think that but for that picce in the Art News I'd have gone on to Cortina. (*He draws near Jane*) Not a word for the lonely wanderer? Don't let the potatoes be over-done. (*And he moves them away from the flame*) And now, dear lady, may one say how-de-do? (*And he offers his hand. She, cook-like, wiping hers on her apron, a performance which John takes in with interest, grasps his warmly. It has cost her an effort, but she has pulled herself together*)

JANE

One may, indeed, though I'm afraid I should hardly have recognized you.

JOHN

Look pretty fit, hey?

JANE

Magnificent.

JOHN

These white flannels. Like 'em?

JANE

Immensely.

JOHN (*to Augustin*)

Not the way a broken-hearted man should look? But within,— ah, within, I bleed. Cold in your head? (*In answer to a fit of sneezing from Augustin*) Nasty things. Try a physic. And otherwise? (*He shakes Augustin's hand energetically*)

JANE

Poor fellow, he has lumbago, too.

JOHN

That *is* tough. But here, I forgot all about the cigar. Perfecto, from the U. S. Saw your two pictures at the Exposition. Charming things. (*Augustin gratefully takes the cigar and lights it with vast relish. John's eye is meantime roving 'round the room. He approaches the canvas*) Good. You've not been idle. Coming along, my boy. Lovely color. (*Maliciously*) Quite like Matisse; — passages of Cezanne, too. Full of reminders of the great ones? A trifle sweet? What do I know about it? Nothing. (*But the barbs have sunk*)

AUGUSTIN (*utterly downcast*)

Too true. Too true. What am I but a feeble mimic?

JOHN (*consolingly*)

A handful lead. The rest of us must follow. At least you have Jane. (*Cheerfully*) Think of my lonely, miserable ten months.

AUGUSTIN (*sympathetic at once*)

How my heart has bled for you.

JANE

And what have you been doing to mend the broken heart?

JOHN

New scenes to find oblivion. In fact, I've been 'round the globe, my dears. What a lark. Oh, blessed freedom. Climbed the Andes, crossed the Sahara, made friends with the Sphinx, golf at Prestwick, motoring through Japan,—wonderful roads,—gasoline so cheap,—and as for the little Geisha girls! After all, what's the use of crying over spilt matrimony?

JANE

After the fifth time, John, you promised me you'd never repeat that. However, I forgive you. It's so true.

JOHN

Particularly when one doesn't want to cry. Gussie, doesn't Jane look the least trifle seedy . . . charming, but seedy? Too much mush, Gussie. You should vary her diet.

JANE

But this isn't mush. It's cabbage.

JOHN (*beside the stove*)

The law simmers down to mutton; the arts stew up into cabbage. (*In his rovings John has found a tattered old garment on a peg on the wall. It is still recognizable. With infinite tenderness he takes it down*) Dear old jacket. I forgave you everything else, Gussie. However, by-gones are by-gones. Keep it. It's a sacred relic. (*And he hangs it back reverently*) And now to be with my two dearest friends.

JANE

But, my dear John, how did you manage to steal away?

JOHN

Told Higgins I had to. Said you'd caught a sudden fever.

AUGUSTIN (*obviously pleased*)

So they don't know over there?

JANE

That was sweet of you, John. But it wasn't sudden, you know. It has been coming on for years.

JOHN

And has she got over it, Augustin?

AUGUSTIN (*starting to make a speech*)

The dreams of —

JANE (*her hand over his mouth*)

Have I, dear? (*But somehow she fails to convince, and, glancing sidewise at John, perceives this. So she turns upon him insouciantly*) And tomorrow, I suppose, you continue on your travels?

JOHN (*instantly*)

Tonight. The Innsbruck express.

AUGUSTIN

So soon? No, no, we cannot let you go like that. Art is not law. Our quarters are narrow. Such as they are, they are yours.

JANE

Nonsense, Augustin. He'd be horribly in the way.

JOHN

Besides where'd I sleep? No, Gussie, it won't do to put you out. Or can we arrange it, Jane? (*He smells the cabbage again*) That cabbage. My mouth waters.

JANE

You found the right pills, at last?

JOHN

I threw them all into the ash can.

JANE

You see how wise we all were. It was I that disagreed.

JOHN

They departed together, Gussie; she and the pills. My two most constant companions. (*He bangs a knife handle against a tin-plate*) Dinner. Dinner. (*He adds a third place at the table, by moving up a chair and setting down the tin-plate*) Or is this luncheon? Five o'clock; a late luncheon? An early dinner? Never mind. Not coming, Gussie?

AUGUSTIN

Cabbage?

JOHN (*filling a plate with the odorous, steaming vegetable*) Very well. (*He carries it to Augustin*) Ich dien. Love's service. His head was in the stars. How could he see it was raining? Wasn't he wonderful, Jane?

JANE

And wasn't it all for the best?

[*There is a knock at the door left. Augustin opens it. A grimy urchin holds a letter. Augustin opens it and reads.*

AUGUSTIN (*tremendously excited*)

Carpacci! Carpacci!

JANE

What's the matter with Carpacci?

AUGUSTIN

Carpacci's downstairs. Carpacci wants to see me.

JANE

Why doesn't he come up? He generally does.

JOHN

Have Carpacci to lunch. I like the name.

AUGUSTIN (*changing his coat rapidly, no further thought of lumbago in his head*) He writes the stairs are too hard for his wife. (*He makes a bolt for the door, bowling over the boy as he rushes out pell-mell. The boy, who had expected a somewhat different reward for his services, begins to bellow*)

JOHN

Stop your howling, you young rascal. Here, take this. (*He sets the boy up on his feet, gives him a coin and sends him on his way rejoicing*) Who's Carpacci?

JANE

The President of the Academy or something. Maybe the jury gave Gussie an honorable mention. (*Dismissing Augustin*) I got those stamps. Thanks, but they're not mine.

JOHN (*leaning against the easel*)

Now you are annoying me.

JANE

Look out for paint. Turn 'round. (*He does so*)
Your shoulder. What a shame. (*She gets a bottle
of turpentine and a rag*)

JOHN

Don't bother. You know those stamps belong to
you.

JANE

Those gorgeous clothes! (*And she sets to work to
rub out the spot*)

JOHN

I want to show you something.

JANE

Do stand still.

JOHN

It's a stamp. I want your opinion. I'm afraid it's
a counterfeit.

JANE

There. It doesn't show a bit. Let me see your
counterfeit. (*He takes it from his wallet and hands
it to her*) Isn't that wonderful?

JOHN (*proudly*)

The set is completed.

JANE

I never believed you could do it. It's splendid.

JOHN

Perfect condition too. Got it in Hawaii. It's a
great yarn. Some day I'll tell you. And now if
you want to make me happy, take it. What good is
it to me, since you have the rest?

JANE (*touched*)

Thanks, John. I can't.

JOHN (*begging*)

Please. . . . Come now. . . . Perhaps . . . more likely than not — we'll never see each other again. And we did have wonderful times collecting that set. . . . (*The Vespuccio baby is restive again. It yells lustily*)

JANE

Dear me, I must go to the baby.

JOHN (*bordering on collapse*)

W-What baby?

[*Jane, surprised at John's tone, looks up at him, immediately divines the cause of his profound disturbance, and is immensely grateful to the Vespuccios for their offspring.*

JANE

Paolo. Four months old. Paolo and Francesca, you know.

JOHN (*aghast*)

Four — It's . . .

[*There is a timid knock at the door right. Mrs. Vespuccio opens the door. She is a brown-eyed young Madonna. Her baby is on her arm.*

MRS. VESPUCCIO

Signora — prego.

JANE

Io me ne vado — si, — si, — subito.

[*Mrs. Vespuccio retires into her apartment.*

JOHN

The — the nurse, I suppose.

JANE

No, idiot, — the mother.

JOHN (*in a flat tone*)

O — O — I see.

JANE

I see you do. She does my washing, and helps with cleaning the studio — not very well, I'm afraid. And I take care of Paolo when she goes out. That's what I'm going to do now. Want to come? He's the dearest little fellow. (*She leads the way toward the adjoining apartment, enters it while John stands at the door-way, watching. No longer visible, she is crooning over the child*) Pretty bambino. (*The child gurgles*) Put down your little headie. Why, John, he's smiling at you.

JOHN

Is he? (*And with an idiotic grimace, John swings his watch frantically to and fro on its chain*)

JANE

There's a draught on him. Come in or stay out. But shut the door.

[*John, closing the door behind him, joins Jane and the infant. The stage is empty. But for a moment only. It is filled with no physical presence, but by a Voice,— a hoarse, bass voice, chanting, or rather bawling a ribald old ballad. It is the classic ditty “Samuel Small.”*

THE VOICE

“ My name is Samuel Small, Samuel Small,
My name is Samuel Small,
And I hates you one and all
For a gang of muckers all — ”

[*The voice has been approaching. It is very near; and now the door is flung open with such violence as to make the windows rattle. Augustin is in the door-way. With a roar he adds the refrain.*

AUGUSTIN

—“Damn your eyes.” News. Glorious news.

[One sees with astonishment that here is a new super-Augustin. His cheeks are flushed. His eyes shine with exaltation. He sees that they are gone; striding back and forth across the room like a turkey gobbler, he continues the song which is reserved for his great moments.

“ And this shall be my knell, parting knell,
And this —”

(He is arrested by the canvas which had been the subject of John's comments. Suddenly it has a new interest for him., He cocks his head at it, bends down, looks at it sidewise. Contemptuously) A trifle sweet? Cezanne? Matisse? Who are they? (He turns his back to it, spreads his legs far apart, bends down almost to the floor, and through the window of his legs, his head upside down he surveys it again) What color. What an arrangement. What dignity of posture. (He is erect again and is addressing a breathless audience) My dear, dear friends, words will not phrase the depth of my emotion. This all too generous — this undeserved honor to the humble American — here in the very home of genius — (His singing is resumed, speech being an insufficient vehicle for his emotions)

“ And this shall be my knell, parting knell,
And this shall be my knell,
Hope you go right plumb to hell,
Hope you fry and sizzle well,
Damn your eyes.”

[Jane re-enters on tip-toe, John at her heels.

JANE

Ssh! Ssh! Ssh! Do be still. Paolo's asleep.

AUGUSTIN

Wake him. Tell him the glorious news. The gold medal of honor. Wake them all — and the prize of a thousand —

JANE

What? Isn't that splendid, splendid? But please do make just a little less noise. The gold medal. Why, Gussie.

JOHN

We'll have a parade in Kansas City when I get back.

AUGUSTIN

Cezanne, hey? Trifle sweet? They consider it the most daring and original canvas of a decade. A decade. I only repeat what Mrs. Carpacci said. This evening at six Carpacci gives a banquet to the prize winners.

JOHN

And are you to make a speech?

AUGUSTIN

They expect it. I am the guest of honor.

JOHN

Make it short, Gussie.

JANE

What dress shall I wear, Augustin?

[*Augustin's jaw drops.*

JOHN

Jane, Jane, a little more tact, please.

AUGUSTIN

Rose of the world, you see —

JANE

What am I to see?

JOHN

I must say you are dense. Augustin sees; Mrs. Carpacci sees. I see. You are not invited, Jane. This is the symposium of genius. Did I ever take you to the Bar Association dinners? You don't seem to realize what this means. Gussie is an international figure. His photograph will be in the Sunday supplements. (*To Augustin*) You old rascal!

AUGUSTIN

An imitator, hey? (*He pounds John on the back and bursts once more into song*)

“Oh, the parson, he did come, he did come.”

JANE (*enjoining silence*)

Please, please!

AUGUSTIN (*continuing*)

“Oh, the parson, he did come.”

JANE (*irritated*)

You know Paolo is teething. Do be still.

AUGUSTIN (*infuriated*)

Paolo, Paolo, Paolo, Paolo! And what of Augustin?

JOHN (*patching it up*)

You'd better be running along to your banquet. Come along, Jane; we'll ride down the Grand Canal and get a bit of dinner. My train doesn't leave until nine. What do you say? I'll return her safely, Gussie — in a month or so.

[*Augustin gives a quick, questioning look toward John. A sudden, terrible change comes over him.*]

AUGUSTIN (*with slow and tragic emphasis*)

Stop, listen to me. This —(*he turns to Jane*) This is life's crucial moment.

JOHN

What? Again? Horrors!

AUGUSTIN

We stand —

JOHN

Don't be frightened, Gussie. Pepita in Madrid, Bridget in Londonderry, dark-eyed Rachel in the Orient,— you don't think I'd give up all that? You shall have her back safe, sound and undamaged, all in the original package, at eight forty-five.

JANE

I am beginning to be a bit afraid of these crucial moments myself. But, Gussie, what about a high hat?

[Augustin is overwhelmed.

JANE

I have it. Trafford. You could borrow his. I'd run right over for it if I were you.

[Augustin seizes his hat and rushes to the door. Door-knob in hand, he stops.

AUGUSTIN

Rose of the world! Fairest of —

JOHN

Never mind. We catch the drift. You are a noble fellow. And, by Jove, you know that picture in my sitting room will be worth enough now to pay my entire trip. (*And he slams the door on Augustin*) The lapse; the relapse. Sorry, old girl, but it's only too plain. He's chucked you.

JANE

And made a dashing exit, too.

JOHN

He improves.

JANE

Gussie's really a dear boy.

JOHN (*generously*)

He is. He is. (*Solicitously*) But look here, it does make rather a hash of things for you.

JANE

Does it? I've decided to accept that stamp, John. Richardson has a standing offer of two thousand pounds for the set, you know. I shall climb the Andes. I shall make friends with the Sphinx. Blessed freedom.

JOHN

But about dinner. I can't stomach another one of those continental table d'hôtes.

JANE

I know such a cosy little place.

JOHN

Get your bonnet.

[*She does so. It has been growing a little dark. John pulls up the latticed blinds, so that she may have light enough to put on her hat; and Venice in the magic of early dusk lies before them. Its vistas, the green of the sky rising into ultra-marine above, melting into rose below, the first star over the campanile of San Giorgio, look in upon them. A gondolier's song floats faintly up. They stand looking out.*

Rather decent, isn't it?

[*Jane's veil becomes tangled. John is quick to the rescue with skilful fingers, born of long practice. Their faces are very near together as they stand at the window, black silhouettes against the deepening sky.*

And when do you leave Venice?

JANE

Whenever you do.

JOHN

Whenever I do? You expect me to take you back, Madam?

JANE

Heaven preserve me. I shall take the train that goes in the opposite direction. At dinner you shall tell me all the interesting places.

JOHN

What's this? (*His hand has dropped on a little book lying on the window sill. She snatches for it. There is a brief scuffle. John bends his eyes close to it in the gathering dusk. There is a thrill in his voice despite himself*) My sonnets! Those miserable sonnets? Take the wretched things. (*But it appears she no longer wants them*) Very well. They shall go where they deserve. (*He lifts his arm, preparing to fling them out of the window. She stays him*)

JANE

No, Jack. They'd float. Somebody might pick them up — and read them. That would be too dreadful. Give them to me. (*Paolo cries softly in his sleep*) The little honey. Let's go out that way. We'll tuck him in. Come along. (*At the Vespuccio door*) Be terribly quiet. (*By now it is quite dark. John, following her, stumbles over a chair*) Clumsy. Do be careful.

JOHN

But I can't see.

JANE

Give me your hand, then. Where is it?

JOHN

Can't you see it? (*They join hands*) This cosy little place of yours. Just what sort of a place is it?

JANE

A jolly, old, fat Englishman runs it.

JOHN

English? By Jove! A baked potato, a leg of mutton.

JANE

The very thing.

JOHN

A change from cabbage. . . . Mutton. . . . And capers. Don't forget the capers, old lady. It's a long time since we've had capers together.

[And very cautiously they tip-toe out together, shutting the Vespuccio door silently behind them. In a moment a light sifts into the room from the glass transom above the Vespuccio door. And now Augustin re-enters. The tall hat is on his head. It is very noble, but a trifle too large for him, so that it is resting on his ears. He sees the light over the transom. He climbs on a chair and looks through for a moment. He climbs down. Whatever it is that he has seen, he is well satisfied. The light next door goes out. The room is in darkness. Augustin strikes a match and lights a lamp. He takes a deep breath or two as a man who has been under water. He stretches his arms out mightily. From below Jane calls out.]

JANE

Gondolier! Gondolier!

[*Augustin now moves the pier glass to the front of the room, removes the hat, and lamp in hand, brushes his hair with great precision into a careful disorder. Satisfied, he resumes the hat, first stuffing a bit of newspaper under its band. Then he arrays himself in a very solemn long frock coat, taking it from a hook on the wall. He is almost ready,—not quite. He goes to the sink and scrubs his hands sketchily with soap and water, cleans his nails with a pocket-knife, polishes them with a chamois buffer and (shall it be written down?) puts a little carmine paste on them. Then he shakes a drop of Cologne on his handkerchief. He makes a final inspection before the mirror; he passes muster; he puts down the lamp. He selects a walking stick standing near the stove. He sniffs frowningly at the kettle of cabbage. He lays the stick down, throws wide open one of the casement windows, goes to the stove, lifts from it the kettle, takes it to the window, and leaning over, casts it into the canal. One hears the splash far below. He turns the lamp low, takes the stick once more, tilts his hat awry, bows deeply before the self-portrait, and then, twirling his cane as if it were a drum major's baton, he strides from the room, singing at top-voice as he goes. The words of the song are these:*

“For my name is —”

[*He slams the door. The stars look in on a deserted room. From below one hears the ripple of the water as the gondola stops, and faintly one hears John and Jane laughing together.*

